

Williams, Ralph Hodder

Sept, Oct. 1915

October 7th, 1915

Lieutenant Ralph Hodder Williams,

School of Instruction, St. Albans, Herts. England.

Dear Mr. Williams:

I was greatly interested in your long letter which you were good enough to send me. Two days ago when I gave my opening address I quoted parts of it to the students and staff.

Your experiences with the University unit were exceedingly interesting, and it is a pleasure to know that Varsity yells are heard in England. I suppose that many of the poor fellows often think with longing hearts of the homes that they have left. It is a pity that Smith is unable to command his own unit at present. I hope, however, that by this time he may have rejoined them in France. It is a great credit to him that his men have rallied around him so strongly that he has got an esprit de corps into them.

It must be a bit lonely for you to start off with a new regiment though the position of a commissioned officer should I fancy be very much more congenial to you than that of Sergeant. I understand that regiments are being sent across rapidly to France. Possibly you may be there yourself by this time.

We are now getting under way. The attendance is much reduced, perhaps 500 fewer men than last year, though this is as it should be. The C. O. T. C. is being organised, and with the experience of last year and the better trained officers we expect good results.

Professor Wrong is having a hard enough time, as he will write you, in arranging for the work of his depleted staff, but I hope that he will be able to get through the winter some how.

There are a number of new men. MacIver, for instance, has taken the place of Lloyd in Economics, and we have an Englishman from Leeds via Alberta as Associate Professor in German. He comes well recommended. Cochrane is very busy with recruiting. We have also set Dr. Abbott apart to serve with a civilian committee as its secretary for this purpose. Though the earlier part of the summer was somewhat discouraging, a change seems to have come, and there is now marked improvement.

One is very much distracted with interests local and routine as usual, while at the same time one cannot take one's mind off the struggle that is going on in Europe. There is no chance of our forgetting the men at the front, though we cannot ^{all} remember them individually. Varsity's showing is good. Already there are 1200 graduates and undergraduates on active service. I heard last night that McGill and Queen's also are feeling very markedly the effects of the war, and that their attendance is greatly reduced.

I shall always be glad to hear from you. With kind regards,

I am,

Yours sincerely,

President.





School of Instruction
St. Albans. Herts.
September 11th 1915

Dear Mr President,

Another fortnight and the University year will be on
you again in Toronto, and no small number of alumni
will be thinking of you also in Flanders and in English
training camps. I have been out of touch with George
Smith since I was gazetted in the English army, and he
may have given you news already. But in case he has not —
I am sending you some description of the fortunes
of No 2 Platoon, Second University Company C.E.F. —
quorum olim ego pars minimus.

You and I know have a special interest in
them both in the Princess Patricia's, and so I hope
with the whole university, because they form perhaps
the first distinct 'Varsity' unit that has left for
the front. The majority of the men were University
graduates from Toronto, and practically the whole
platoon was enlisted by George Smith himself in
Toronto. Moreover, it was officered entirely by 'Varsity'
men. George Smith was the platoon commander,
an erstwhile senior colleague of his, whose name we
need not recall, was his platoon sergeant, while his
section commanders were T.S. Gordon, U.C. 1912, Guy
Dunstan U.C. 1915, H. Lawrence, Wycliffe 1916, B.S.
Campston, Trinity 1915, and K.C. Burners, S.P.S. 1917.
Every college including Victoria & St. Michael's and O.A.C.
was represented in the platoon, and practically every
faculty. From the first we had a unity and pride of

our own, and this one and all will I know agree to lay
to the honour of George Smith, who organized us so well
and became so popular, and whose fall (he has been
left behind in England owing to superfluity of officers in
the Patricias) was the one fly in the ointment when
the company got its marching orders.

In our opinion, there is no gainsaying it, we
were the best platoon in a company that was thought
good enough to go to the front after only five weeks
in England. We challenged, and generally humiliated,
the world at baseball; and best of all, we were
always "from Toronto." The hedgerows of East Kent have
heard the strains of "Toronto is a University"; "Yes! we
are from Toronto," and the old Ontario strains; and those
of us who had to say good bye to the boys while
they were still in Shorecliffe, went with a crashing
"Toronto, Toronto, Toronto Varsity" ringing in our ears.

Some of the best men that the University
has ever had on her rolls, Sir, are there in the
trenches now. They have not yet had their baptism
of fire. But when they do - "Varsity" will mean
something more than it did a week ago."

In all the military ardour and
academic preoccupations of the year that lies upon
you at home, none of you will surely forget
the boys who went from Toronto on the
Toronto Varsity platoon of the Patricias, to make the
a famous youngest son of the most famous

regiments in the army yet more famous

They went to the front at the end of last month, as I have said, fore short. Smith, let us hope, will soon have the honour he so richly deserves, of leading his own men, and they will follow him anywhere. The other four were given commissions in the British army, and are all together here at St. Albans, soon to be scattered to the four corners of the British Isles. Alan Telfer, (U.C. 1914), goes to Cork to join the 3rd Battalion of the Dublin Fusiliers, Tom Gordon and Guy Dunstan to Salisbury Plain, as they have had the fortune to be gazetted in the same regiment, the 11th Battⁿ Border Regiment. While I expect at present to go to Cardiff Castle, to join my battalion, the third Battalion of the Welsh Regiment.

All four of us still think of ourselves much more as N.C.O.s and Canadians than as Imperial Army Subalterns. Time will show how far this will wear off. I am inclined to think that we shall

remain good honest Canadians — even myself!

I often feel how greatly I am indebted to you and to Mr. George for putting no obstacles in my way, and realising so sympathetically that I felt that I had to go. In that trespassing on the delicate question of my value to the department of history, I know that my leave of absence will make difficulties and work for those who can't come which I wish could have been avoided. I can only hope that the experiences that may come from a few "crowded hours" of this most

unacademic profession, may help me to make up
for lost time when I have helped "to see the
whole show through", as we say on our route marches.

We realize over here the tremendous effort
that still has to be made. And you too in
Canada know that there must be no
slackening. All the Canadians; and especially
all Toronto University men who go through this
second winter campaign will want to know
that there are more coming and that the
people at home know why.

I must not finish without wishing
you and all my friends in the Faculty
a splendid academic year.

With kindest regards, Sir, to Mr. Falconer
and to yourself.

Yours very sincerely

Robert Gordon Williams,
